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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001181

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ML](#) [MR](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ALGERIA REMAINS FIRM ON MAURITANIA, SEES SOME
PROGRESS IN SAHEL

REF: A. ALGIERS 906

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 704

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) MFA Director General for African Affairs (A/S equivalent) Lounes Magramane told visiting NEA/MAG Director Stephanie Williams November 3 that Algeria remains firmly opposed to the unconstitutional removal of Mauritanian President Abdallahi from power as a result of the August coup. Magramane reiterated Algeria's position that the crisis in Mauritania needed to be resolved by restoring a constitutionally legitimate government (ref A). Magramane also noted that Mauritania remains suspended from Africa Union (AU) activities and added that Mauritania did not attend the recent meeting of African culture ministers in Algiers: "We did not even send them an invitation." Magramane acknowledged, however, that Mauritania still attends Arab League meetings.

PROGRESS IN THE SAHEL, NO THANKS TO BAHANGA

[1](#)2. (C) Turning to other Sahel issues, Magramane quickly clarified that Algeria had no part in the freeing of the Austrian hostages held by AQIM, adding, "that is a bilateral issue between Austria and Mali -- we were not involved." On the Algiers Accord, Magramane emphasized that negotiations had yielded steady, albeit slow progress. Implementation of the Accord, he stressed, was hampered by the failure to respect the cease-fire and lack of trust on both sides. At the last round of meetings held in Algiers in late August, Magramane said, Mali's interior minister attended but Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim ag Bahanga was present only for one of the three meetings held. Magramane remarked that Bahanga was now spending more time in Libya and that his credibility in the process was slipping. "He made his choice," Magramane quipped. The other May 23 Tuareg Alliance delegates present, he said, expressed willingness to cooperate.

[1](#)3. (C) Magramane said the implementation of the Accord hinged on the successful consolidation of the cease-fire agreement. He noted that the Malian army significantly strengthened its positions in the north in May 2006 and that a key Tuareg demand was for the reduction of Mali's military presence in the region -- a condition shared by Algeria (ref B). Magramane said this was a difficult condition for the Malians to accept. The agreement to return to the status quo prior to May 2006, he explained, was an effort to compromise on both sides. Magramane said as part of the status quo the two

sides agreed to the reestablishment of mixed special security units and the establishment of a commission to investigate assassinations committed by both sides. The recent exchange of hostages in August was also an important confidence building measure, he noted.

SAHEL SECURITY AND POSSIBLE COOPERATION

14. (C) Magramane described the atmospherics of the talks as calm and expressed his hope that they would ultimately succeed, with time and patience. Beyond security measures, Magramane underscored the need for economic development in northern Mali to address the underlying cause of tension in the region. Magramane described several infrastructure projects, such as health centers, vocational training centers and drilling projects for water, that Algeria was prepared to finance. He regretted, however, that the Malians did not seem enthusiastic about the potential benefit of development and had done little follow-up.

15. (C) COMMENT: NEA/MAG Director Williams underscored that the U.S. was ready and willing to work with Algeria to find ways we might assist in the implementation of the Algiers Accord. Magramane wryly thanked her for the offer and assured us that the Algerians would "be in contact." He made no specific response to our outstanding offer to discuss U.S. assistance in the stand-up of the mixed security units.

16. (U) NEA/MAG Director Williams did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

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PEARCE